

LYNNE BATTLE'S TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF THE
WESTBARD STUDY GROUP ON THE ROAD ABANDONMENT
OF RIDGEFIELD ROAD AT WESTBARD AVENUE
NOVEMBER 19, 2020

I am here testifying as a member of the Westbard Study Group and resident of Westbard Mews on Westbard Avenue. To more clearly lay out my position, I must set the stage for how this issue first arose.

The plan to abandon Ridgefield Road and realign Westbard Avenue was part of the original plan by Equity One (and subsequently, Regency Development) to redevelop the Westbard Shopping Center as well as parcels on the opposite side of the street. The Planning Board approved a preliminary plan in which the shopping center would be Phase One of an entire redevelopment for which the single most significant public benefit was to be the creation of a beautiful Greenway Park around the Willett Branch stream, in keeping with the Sector Plan's goals.

As part of the redevelopment, Regency is accelerating the road realignment and proposing a faster redevelopment of Westwood II in concert with Kensington Senior Living at the corner of Ridgefield Road and Westbard Avenue, which requires the road abandonment at issue in the hearing. We, and other members of the community, have been hoping to comment on the aspects of new road to the Board, but we were unaware that this hearing would be held until last week.

At the moment, the only true benefits from the project accrue to the developer rather than the public: the new road will allow Westwood II and adjacent properties to be developed more quickly, and the new road will lead more directly to the developer's Westbard shopping center, with none of the traffic lights that currently allow pedestrians to cross the road safely.

We strongly believe that to ensure that the Willett Branch Park is established as a public benefit, Equity One/Regency should begin the creation of the Greenway Park on the property where the abandonment and realignment will occur. When the road is rebuilt, it will have to be constructed over the Kenwood branch stream as it flows into the Willett Branch at the beginning of the proposed Greenway. During construction, the flow of one stream into another should be made into a small waterfall feature that would set off the beginning of the park. Parks and Planning staff proposed this feature a number of years ago, but the developer seems unwilling to create it as part of the road and property redevelopment. We understand that unless it is built while the road is being constructed, the proposed waterfall will probably not be possible to build later on.

The road abandonment will also create a new area on which no construction is contemplated – Lot 24, Block D, as shown on Figure 2 of the staff report, page 3. The staff report does not reference the intended use of this block. While the

preliminary plan envisioned it as a place to put a large number of mitigation trees, we have always believed that the area is too small for this purpose. The trees will be adversely affected by adjacent traffic, and the area would be a much better place for stormwater management (SWM) for the road as a whole. Indeed, at the hearing on the preliminary plan, members of this Board advocated that the developer use SWM best practices for the new Westbard Avenue. Otherwise, road run-off is likely to go down into the newly established greenway park.

Finally, a critical safety need is the installation of a traffic light to cross the new road, which we hope you will ask MCDOT to approve. It is not adequate simply to put in wiring for a traffic light at the intersection on Westbard Avenue that Springfield residents can access, and then wait for a study a year later. With the new road, Springfield drivers will be unable to turn left on Westbard without a traffic light, and no one—including school children—will be able to walk across the road safely. In addition, the realignment will impede the visibility of trucks exiting the delivery area of the Kensington Senior Living building on realigned Westbard for cars, bikes, and walkers raising additional safety concerns. In short, this will be an accident waiting to happen, perhaps leaving the community with injuries and/or deaths as the cost of providing a commercial benefit to this developer.

The abandonment must be permitted only if it helps the health, safety, and welfare of residents. I therefore implore you to order Equity One/Regency and Kensington to begin the creation of a park along the Willett Branch with decent landscaping and a water feature behind the planned senior living facility, and state-of-the-art SWM along the new road. These factors should be required as a condition of granting the desired abandonment so the community is provided the promised Willett Branch Greenway and associated environmental improvements. Further, to construct this realignment without a traffic light in place would be negligence of the highest order.

Respectfully submitted by Lynne Battle

For the Westbard Study Group

(Lynne Battle, Jenny Sue Dunner, Susan Spock, and Marnie Shaul)